

**Tuberculosis (TB)**

**What is tuberculosis (TB)?**

Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacteria, or germs, spread from person to person through the air. TB germs usually affect the lungs, but the germs can affect any part of the body, such as the eyes, spine, or abdomen.

**How is TB spread?**

TB germs spread through the air from one person to another. The germs get into the air when someone with TB disease of the lungs or throat coughs, sneezes, talks, or sings. The germs can stay in the air for several hours. Anyone around a person with TB disease can breathe in the air and get the TB germs. People who breathe in the TB germs can get infected; this is called TB infection or latent TB infection (LTBI). If not treated, TB infection can become TB disease.

Because TB germs spread through the air, people cannot get infected by shaking hands, sitting on toilet seats, or sharing utensils with someone who has TB disease.

**What are latent TB infection and TB disease?**

Not everyone infected with TB germs gets sick. There are two TB-related conditions, latent TB infection and TB disease. There are important differences between latent TB infection and TB disease.

A person with latent TB infection...	A person with TB disease...
Has some TB germs in their body. The TB germs are alive, but inactive.	Has a lot of TB germs in their body. The TB germs are alive and active. This means the germs are multiplying and attacking the body.
Has no symptoms and does not feel sick.	Has symptoms and might feel sick. Symptoms may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a bad cough that lasts 3+ weeks</li> <li>• pain in the chest</li> <li>• coughing up blood</li> <li>• weaknesses or fatigue</li> <li>• unexplained weight loss</li> <li>• no appetite</li> <li>• chills</li> <li>• fever</li> <li>• sweating at night.</li> </ul>
Cannot spread TB germs to others.	May spread TB germs to others.
Usually has a positive TB blood test or skin test indicating TB infection.	Usually has a positive TB blood test or skin test indicating TB infection.
Has a normal chest x-ray and a negative sputum smear and culture.	May have an abnormal chest x-ray, or positive sputum smear or culture.
Should consider treatment for LTBI to prevent TB disease.	Needs treatment for TB disease. If TB disease is left untreated, serious illness or death can occur.

**What are the symptoms of TB disease?**

Symptoms of TB disease depend on where in the body the TB germs are growing. TB germs usually grow in the lungs. TB disease in the lungs may cause symptoms such as:

- a bad cough that lasts three weeks or longer
- pain in the chest
- coughing up blood.

# Frequently Asked Questions

Other symptoms of TB disease are:

- weakness or fatigue
- unexplained weight loss
- no appetite
- chills
- fever
- sweating at night.

People with latent TB infection do not have any symptoms.

**What should I do if I spent time with someone who had TB germs?**

What to do depends on if the person you spent time with had TB disease or latent TB infection.

The person I spent time with had <b>latent TB infection (inactive TB germs)</b> ...	The person I spent time with had <b>TB disease (active TB germs)</b> ...
You do not need to do anything. People with latent TB infection cannot spread TB germs to other people.	DPH or your doctor can advise you how best to protect your health and the health of people around you. If you think you were exposed to TB germs, contact DPH or your doctor.

**How do I get tested for TB?**

There are two tests that can help tell if you were infected with TB germs: a TB blood test or a skin test. DPH or your doctor will pick which test to use. The test used depends on factors like age, medical history, and other factors of the person needing the test.

- The **TB blood test** uses a blood sample to see if you have TB germs in your body. The blood test measures how your immune system reacts to TB germs. You only need one visit for this test. Results are typically available in three to four days. TB blood tests are also called Interferon Gamma Release Assays (IGRAs).
- The **TB skin test** may also be used to find out if you are infected with TB bacteria. The skin test takes two visits. At the first visit, a health care worker injects a small amount of testing fluid, called tuberculin, into the skin on the lower part of your arm. The second visit happens two or three days after the first visit. At the second visit, a health care worker will look for a reaction on your arm. TB skin tests are also called tuberculin skin tests (TSTs).

A positive blood test or skin test usually means that you have TB germs in your body. Other tests may be needed to tell if you have TB disease, like a chest x-ray or laboratory testing of sputum.

**How are latent TB infection and TB disease treated?**

There is medicine that kills TB germs. If you have latent TB infection, taking medicine helps stop you from getting TB disease. There are many options for treating latent TB infection. Treatment for latent TB infection usually does not take as long as treatment for TB disease. If you have TB disease, you need to take several medicines for many months. That is because there are a lot TB germs to kill. If you take the medicine like your doctor or nurse says, it should kill all the TB germs. You can get sick again if you do not take the medicine as instructed.

**Do you have more questions?**

Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/faqs/default.htm> if you have more questions about TB.